

Awareness Information about Sexual Assault

Many people believe that sexual assault occurs only in dangerous neighborhoods and is perpetrated by strangers. Research shows, however, that most sexual assaults and rapes are committed by someone the victim knows. Among victims aged 18 to 29, two-thirds had a prior relationship with the offender¹. During 2000, about six in ten rape or sexual assault victims stated the offender was an intimate, other relative, a friend or an acquaintance². A study of sexual victimization of college women showed that most victims knew the person who sexually victimized them. For both completed and attempted rapes, about 9 in 10 offenders were known to the victim. Most often, a boyfriend, ex-boyfriend, classmate, friend, acquaintance, or co-worker sexually victimized the women³. Anyone can be a victim of sexual assault. Avoiding “dangerous” places will not necessarily protect someone from being sexually assaulted because sexual assaults can happen anywhere, even in the home or workplace.

We can combat sexual assault by raising our own and our community’s awareness about this crime, making sexual violence in any form unacceptable in all communities, being supportive of those who have been victimized, and holding perpetrators accountable.

How can I support someone who has been sexually assaulted?

Do not blame the victim.

Comments such as “Why were you there?”, “How did you get yourself in that situation?” or “You should have known better” place the responsibility of the assault on the victim instead of where it truly belongs - with the offender. Although the intention of asking these questions may be to grasp what had happened, the victim may feel that you are blaming her for the assault. Instead of making comments which could be interpreted as victim blaming, you should:

- ***Listen.***
- ***Offer support.***
- ***Be non-judgmental.***
- ***Assure the victim that the assault was not her fault.***
- ***Respect the victim’s decision.***

You should be supportive and educated about the services available to victims of sexual assault. Keep in mind that the person who was victimized may not choose the option that you think you would take if you were sexually assaulted. Instead of trying to convince someone to take a certain path, respect the victim’s decision about what path she wants to take towards healing and recovery. Everyone copes differently. Remember that the victim is in the best position to decide what option is best for her.

For additional information about sexual assault, you may wish to contact the following agencies and organizations:

Sexual Assault Coalitions of States and Territories ***[link to:***
http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/vawo/saresources.htm]

National Sexual Violence Resource Center ***[link to: www.nsvrc.org]***
Toll-free 877-739-3895
(Supported by the Centers for Disease Control)

Notes

1. Greenfeld, Lawrence A., *Sex Offenses and Offenders: An Analysis of Data on Rape and Sexual Assault*, Bureau of Justice Statistics (1997).
2. Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Crime Characteristics: Violent Crime - Victim/Offender Relationship* (last revised Dec. 20, 2001) <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/cvict_c.htm>
3. Fisher, Bonnie S., Francis T. Cullen and Michael G. Turner, *The Sexual Victimization of College Women* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice and Bureau of Justice Statistics, NCJ 182369 (December 2000).